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SUBJECT: PART 2 OF 3: MODERATES ENDURE IN SADR CITY COUNCIL

Classified By: Classified by Deputy PolCouns Charles O. Blaha, reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) This is the second of three cables on the relationship between the Sadr City District Advisory Council (DAC) and the Sadrists located in the Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS). On May 4, poloff conducted a protracted interview with Heyder S. Zedan and Suaad A. Allami, two leading moderates on the Sadr City DAC, following their meeting with the Adhamiya-Sadr City EPRT. Septel described the Sadrist take over of the Sadr City DAC between 2003 and 2006, this cable examines the moderates' recent "push back" against the Sadrists. The final cable (septel) will provide detailed information about contemporary life in Sadr City, including a Sadrist extortion racket and available healthcare facilities.

¶2. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: Sadr City DAC Members Heyder S. Zedan and Suaad A. Allami told poloff May 4 that they figure among the nine moderates who contend with 30 Sadrists on the 39-member Sadr City DAC. Over time, these moderates have gained power in the DAC through competence, expertise, and tactical thinking, culminating in their leadership of 11 of the DAC's 13 committees. By leading DAC committees, moderates can sometimes initiate meetings, projects and relationships independent of Sadrist control (such as meetings with USG officials). They can also steer DAC policy in key areas where Sadrists generally seek total control. The Sadrists, an ostensibly confession-based party, even allow moderates to control the Religion Committee. Political pragmatism appears to have trumped religious ideology on the Sadr City Council. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

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TACTIC 1: DEMONSTRATE COMPETENCE AND EXPERTISE  
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¶3. (C) Zedan and Allami, respectively a doctor and a lawyer, described the Sadrists as generally "uneducated" and unqualified for their jobs on the DAC. Nonetheless, they claimed to have developed good relationships with every member of the DAC, including the 30 Sadrists. (NOTE: The DAC began in 2003 with 41 members, but DAC members have not replaced the original Chairman, who was killed, or another member, who fled the country before resigning. Thus the membership now stands at 39. END NOTE.) The moderates have focused their energy on demonstrating their competence and expertise on specific issues. By emphasizing efficiency over ideology, they claim to have acquired the power to influence their Sadrist colleagues, occasionally, to vote based on the merits of each decision instead of explicit instructions from OMS. (NOTE: The Chairman of the DAC is a staunch Sadrist who will not meet with USG officials. It is unclear the extent to which other Sadrists on the DAC can act independently of OMS. Zedan and Allami claimed that this freedom exists, but did not specify its extent, or any other details, such as implicit or explicit red lines that OMS may have established. END NOTE.)

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TACTIC 2: TAKE CHARGE OF COMMITTEES  
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14. (C) The moderates' demonstrated competence and expertise has translated into control of 11 out of 13 DAC committees (some of the nine moderates lead more than one committee). According to Zedan, OMS simply does not have qualified candidates to place on the DAC. As a result, Sadrists have ceded control of all but two committees: the Finance Committee, and the Oil Committee. OMS clings to these committees because they have proved most likely to bring the Sadrists revenue. "If it has money," Zedan explained, "then they lead it." The 11 committees controlled by moderates cover the following issues: Health and Environment; Civil Society; Law; Immigration (into Sadr City); Political Prisoners; Women and Children; Public Services; Anti-Corruption; Youth and Sports; Media and Public Relations; and Religion.

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TACTIC 3: EXPOLIT SADRIST PRAGMATISM  
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15. (C) Zedan and Allami described the current DAC Chairman's bid for re-election as an example of OMS pragmatism. They said that Chairman Abdel Hassan Al-Jibara has weak leadership skills and little understanding of key issues. He has lost popular support even among Sadrists on the DAC, and OMS seems to have lost confidence in him. He keeps postponing his own re-election in order to avoid, according to Zedan and Allami, an inevitable defeat. "Everyone wants someone elected who can do a good job," Zedan said, including OMS. Zedan and Allami perceive this pragmatic desire for effective

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governance as a weakness of OMS leaders, because it requires them occasionally to compromise instead of always imposing their will. "We will work on every weak point" among the Sadrists, Zedan said. Zedan and Allami also suspected that Al-Jibara did not check in with the OMS office often enough, to ensure that he adhered to their party line. They hope to exploit the situation by pressing for the re-election of a former Sadr City DAC Chairman, Hassam Shamar, who is an independent.

16. (C) When pressed, Zedan and Allami described fissures within the Sadrists on the Sadr City DAC. Three broad types of Sadrists serve on the council, they explained: those on the "right" (hard-line), in the "middle" (moderate Sadrists), and on the "left" (comparatively amenable to influence). They said that Al-Jibara's poor performance has increased the number of Sadrists susceptible to the persuasion of moderates. Zedan and Allami estimated that the DAC's 30 Sadrists currently break down approximately as follows: 5 right, 5 middle, and 20 left.

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COMMENT  
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17. (C) COMMENT: The OMS actions described by Zedan and Allami raise a key question: why have the Sadrists permitted non-Sadrists to assume leadership roles in the DAC, namely by chairing 11 of the DAC's 13 committees? Sadrists clearly have the power -- through a majority of votes on the council, and through their traditional intimidation tactics -- to insist that Sadrists lead every aspect of the DAC's activities. OMS leaders may have allowed moderates to lead because the DAC no longer matters to them. The DAC does not currently threaten their control of Sadr City, and they have enough alternative revenue streams (see, for example, septel on OMS extortion rackets) to disregard the USG resources they might have accessed in the past through the DAC.

18. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: The opposite argument also seems

plausible: the DAC is so important to Sadrists that they will permit moderates to lead it. By taking over the DAC when it had a popular mandate and access to extensive resources, OMS leaders unwittingly assumed responsibility for the institution's success. In fact, if the DAC did not matter to them, the Sadrists could try to shut it down, or refuse to take part instead of seeking to take control. Instead, they have exerted energy to install loyal members, and have accepted the political compromise inherent in permitting moderates to play a significant role. By leading DAC committees, moderates can sometimes initiate meetings, projects and relationships independent of OMS control (such as meetings with USG officials). They can also steer DAC policy in key areas -- including women, media, and religion -- where Sadrists generally seek total control. The Sadrists, an ostensibly confession-based party, even allow moderates to control the Religion Committee. Political pragmatism appears to have trumped religious ideology on the Sadr City Council. END COMMENT.

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